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In Memoriam

TOSCA LYON



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JANUARY 17, 1904



Frances Bartlett



MCMIV

II

ONE said, " Life's fever ended, she sleeps well;
Thou wouldst not call her back to the old pain,
To hear the sobbing of November rain,
To lie a captive 'neath grim Winter's spell."
Nay, God knows, nay! Not e'en when leaf-buds swell,
And apple-blossoms blush to life again,
Or through the orchard lilts a bluebird's strain;
For fields are always green where she doth dwell.
But now the thought of self leaps over all, —
The lonely days, the lonely days to come!
When Longing's wings shall beat against Fate's wall
Till they are bruised and their chords are numb;
When from the deeps my heart to hers will call,
And pitiless earth and sea and sky be dumb!

III

I GRIEVED, "The Spring will not be Spring this year;
Unlit the candles on the chestnut-trees;
Pallid the amethyst of flood-tide seas;
E'en the first robin's carol ring less clear."
And then I heard her voice say, "Be of cheer;
I am not dead but risen, where disease
Or sleeplessness is not, and longing frees
The soul to follow those it once held dear."
Thus shall the prophecy of April skies,
When peach-trees don, each one, its bridal veil,
Bear a significance beyond surmise, —
In death as life my Lady will not fail.
Warm 'neath the snow to-night June's first rose lies.
Stronger than Death is Love, and will prevail.

IV*

THEY brought me visions of the still lagoons,
Where myriad shallops flit on tawny wings;
They breathed the fragrance of a thousand Springs,
They wore the purple of a thousand Junes.
I saw Venetia's domes, like wraiths of moons,
Peer from the tide, nor back nor forward swings;
I heard the strophes of the song it sings,
In memory of pageant-crowded noons.
And then my gracious Lady came to me —
(Fairest of all fair visions!) sweetly dressed
As last I saw her — with life's ecstasy
In smiling eyes and smiling lips expressed.
Now all is silence; and I only see
The violets laid upon her quiet breast.

* A bunch of violets sent by my Lady from Venice in 1901.

V

OFTTIMES when I was lonely I would say,
“Perchance my gracious Lady thinks of me!”
Thus comfort drew e’en from uncertainty,
While every threatening shadow fled away.
“God give her peace,” I prayed, when brake the day;
“God give her sleep,” I prayed, when sky and sea
Were mingled in Creation’s mystery,
As Twilight’s noiseless feet crept o’er the Bay.
Across the silver splendor of the snow
The sun’s last arrows wing their shining flight;
But oh! that sunset of a year ago,
And her sweet face, that made its gold more bright!
Yet peace and sleep are hers; and I—I know
My gracious Lady thinks of me to-night.

VI

IT was my birthday, and she came to me,
A captive in the prison-house of Pain;
Snapped with a kiss the cruel bonds in twain,
And led me forth into the sunlight, free.
Her arms were full of flowers tinged rosily,
As if a little they had softly lain
Against her dimpled cheek. (Sweet, words are vain;
The Spring itself was manifest in thee!)
To-night my heart into the silence flings
A grief would every comfort disavow.
Yet is 't the pulsing of the air's soft wings,
Or my dear Lady's hand, upon my brow?
The Angelus, or her clear voice, that rings,
"I never was as near to thee as now"?

VII

SOMETIMES that sense of nearness drives her far!
So near! Why not an instant still the ache
Of my torn heart, whose waves of longing break
With hopeless passion against Death's grim bar?
Why not tear from her face the veils that mar
The meagre sunlight that my faith can make,
As through the clouds, would darken the sun's wake,
Has slipped at last the lovely Evening Star?
Thus the lament of self, that but avers
Its desolation and its right to weep.
But now Love's Pool of Healing Memory stirs,
Leads me within, and gives me comfort deep.
She longed for Spring — eternal Spring is hers;
She longed for sleep — dreamless to-night her sleep.

VIII

SLOWLY the cellos sang their solemn strain,
As all the sorrow since Time's birth hour crept
Across their heartstrings, or as pines were swept
By the chill fingers of autumnal rain.
Then, o'er the quivering hopelessness and pain,
A viol's ecstasy to heaven leapt,
Flooding the threnody till heartache slept,
Till Love o'er Death was conqueror once again.
And as, when storms break with the breaking day,
A thankful thrush unto the young Dawn trills,
Shaking from its soft throat such roundelay
That every blade of the lush field grass thrills,—
Through tears Faith sang, "The Spring is on its way,
And I shall see my Lady when God wills."

IX

GOOD Hesperus, if thou dost note to-night,
Upon thy shining path from bar to bar
Of the unfathomed sky, a stranger star;
Or where the Dawn first shakes the amber light
Of her soft tresses, that the pave be bright
For the still wheels of Phœbus' golden car;
Or where on heaven's high wall the scimitar
Of Dian hangs, with mystic scrolls bedight;
If one go singing on its happy way,
While every cloud before it melts in air;
If its white splendor make the midnight day,
And in its presence thou forget all care;
If comfort stream around it ray on ray, —
That Star, my Lady, lovely past compare.

X

O H thou, my sweetest Lady and Delight,
Whose presence always brought the Spring to me,
Whose voice was like a viol's melody,
Whose touch transported me to love's pure height,
I will not think that never to my sight
Shalt thou be given, for that were cruelty
Impossible to Love's divine decree,
Who made the world, yet marks a sparrow's flight.
But as e'en now, beneath the drifting snow,
April's first violet is on its way,
So, 'neath the clouds of loneliness that blow
Across my heart, trembles Faith's quenchless ray.
And when Sleep's hand shall ope mine eyes, I know
I shall behold thee, brighter than the day.

XI

THE Spring will always be more fair to me,
Silver of snowdrops chiming April's hymn,
Blush of young mayflowers in the forest dim,
The hyacinthine splendor of the sea,
The dawn-tipped blossoms of an apple-tree,
The flash of wings from budding limb to limb,
Purple of lilacs on the garden's rim, —
Because they brought to her felicity.
And when the wind breathes prophecies of May,
The first glad bluebird bids the world rejoice,
A lark's thanksgivings through the sunrise leap,
Or birch leaves rustle softly, I shall say,
"Like this the cadence of my Lady's voice,
To whom, Belovèd, God has given sleep."

XII

THOU snowy-petalled Rose of Saxony,
Transported to our bleak New England shore,
Where day and night the plumèd hemlocks roar
A vain defiance to the conquering sea;
The warmth and fragrance of whose sympathy,
Given without stint from thy heart's golden store,
Flooding our northern shadows o'er and o'er,
Comforted every soul drew nigh to thee:
God's favor rested on thy gracious head;
And when Fate's arrows strove to tear apart
Thy delicate petals, ere their color sped,
Or haunting sweetness, with divinest art
He plucked thee from this land, whence Spring had fled,
To bloom forever in His changeless heart.

XIII

SWEET Heart and dearest Lady, twilight falls.
I pray thee come to me a little space,
And light the way, lest I should fail to trace
Faith's footsteps, — so the loneliness appalls.
A homing sparrow to its nest-mate calls;
Into the east two seagulls wing apace;
Twain are the shining clouds that interlace
And drift together, past the sunset walls; —
While I must on into the night alone,
The solace of e'en one star disallowed.
And when I slip, beset by brier and stone,
'Chance miss the highroad, so the hot tears shroud,
And make to thee, who ne'er didst fail, my moan,
Silence unbroken — silence — and thick cloud!

XIV

NAY, come not back! I would not have thee, Sweet,
Retrace thy footsteps from Sleep's lilied stream,
Where field on field of nodding poppies gleam,
And asphodels, less white than thy white feet,
Blow drowsily; but far from wind and sleet,
Thy days aflood with sunlight, beam on beam,
Thy nights unvexed by wakefulness or dream,
Rest, till Love's call shall bid the æons meet.
Each sunrise shall be welcome, that it makes
The time of separation one night less;
Each sunset shall be welcome, that it takes
Another day; and e'en the loneliness,
Within that dream which only Sleep's kiss breaks,
Thy love shall consecrate, thy memory bless.

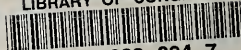
XV

THOU silver-sandalled Dian, huntress maid,
Threading the tangled pathways of the sky,
If thou shouldst meet my Lady, pass not by,
Lest haply she be lonely or afraid!
She was so lapped in love that since she strayed
Into the fields of asphodel, that lie
On either side Sleep's river, she might sigh
For those who walked beside, through sun and shade.
Thou canst not fail to know her. None but she
Has hair the color of frost-ripened corn,
And eyes the color of an April sea,
And lips the color of a rose new-born.
And when she speaks, will straight come back to thee
That song the stars sang at Creation's morn!

FRANCES BARTLETT.

Boston, Massachusetts,
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